



\$2.99 #16

Nodwick

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BY AARON WILLIAMS

RUNNING the GAUNTLET

FROM ARTAX'S JOURNAL: IT HAS BEEN AN ODD FEW MONTHS SINCE YEAGAR WON THE TOURNAMENT AND GAINED HIS MAGICAL GAUNTLET. FOR ONE, WE DIDN'T REALIZE THAT A KINGDOM CAME WITH IT.

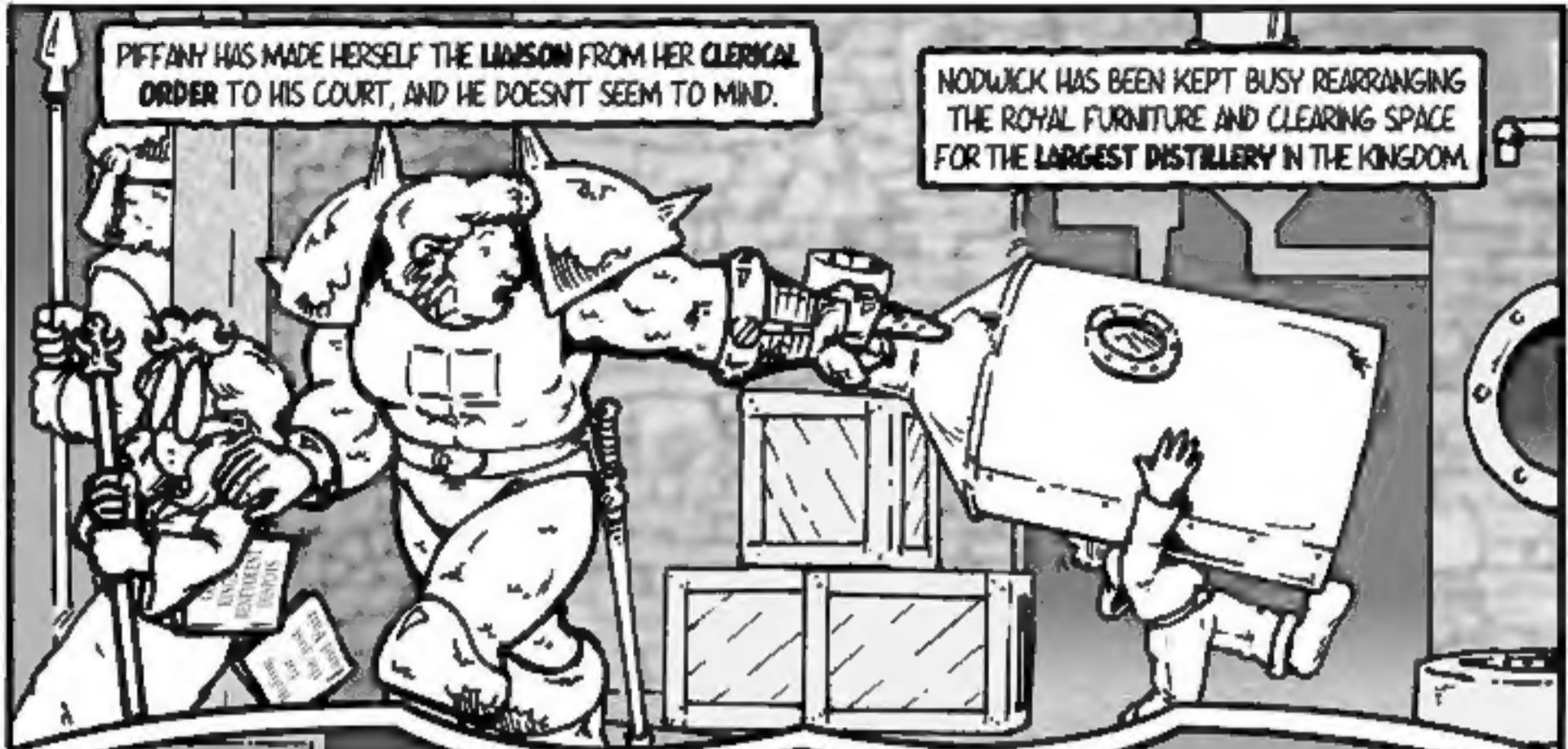
NOT THAT HE WOULD HAVE NEEDED TO BE CROWNED, MIND YOU. AFTER ALL, HE DOES HAVE THE GAUNTLET AND ALL THE POWERS THAT COME WITH IT.

FOR STARTERS, NO ONE CAN DISOBEDIENCE HIS EVERY WHIM WHEN HE'S AROUND. HE APPOINTED ME 'COURT MAGICIAN,' AND I CAN'T TELL IF I ACCEPTED BECAUSE I WANTED TO OR IF THE GAUNTLET COMPELLED ME TO.

THE GAUNTLET IS AN IMPRESSIVE ARTIFACT. NO BLOW CAN LAND ON YEAGAR WHILE HE WEARS IT, AND HE CAN SEND ELDRITCH ENERGIES FROM IT WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT.

PIFFANY HAS MADE HERSELF THE LIAISON FROM HER CLERICAL ORDER TO HIS COURT, AND HE DOESN'T SEEM TO MIND.

NODWICK HAS BEEN KEPT BUSY REARRANGING THE ROYAL FURNITURE AND CLEARING SPACE FOR THE LARGEST DISTILLERY IN THE KINGDOM.



I WRITE THESE WORDS SO THAT I MIGHT HAVE A RECORD OF MY THOUGHTS WHEN NOT UNDER KING YEAGAR'S INFLUENCE. I'VE SCOLVED THE ROYAL LIBRARIES, AND I'VE DISCOVERED SOME DISTURBING THINGS ABOUT THE METAL GLOVE HE WEARS.

I ONLY HOPE I CAN ACT ON THIS KNOWLEDGE BEFORE I'M 'CONVINCED' TO DO OTHERWISE...

HEY, ART! WHAT'S SHAKING?

UH, UM, NOT MUCH, YOUR MAJESTY.

HAH, FORGET THAT "YOUR MAJESTY" STUFF. WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING UP?



MAGICAL ARTIFACTS...

TO BE SPECIFIC,
YOUR GAUNTLET—

YEAH, ISN'T IT GREAT? I
THINK I'VE LEARNED ENOUGH ABOUT IT
TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD MY ARMY.

ARMY?
WHAT ARMY?



OH, THE
ANSERINIAN EMPIRE IS
CAUSING TROUBLE ON
THE BORDER.

I'M GOING TO LEAD AN
EXPEDITIONARY FORCE TO THE
BORDER ZONE AND MAKE SURE
THEY KNOW WE WON'T PUT UP
WITH ANY SHENANIGANS.

I MUST
SAY, BEING KING
SEEMS TO AGREE
WITH YOU.

NO JOKE! I DON'T KNOW
IF IT'S THE GLOVE OR NOT, BUT I'VE NEVER
FELT MORE CONFIDENT! I FEEL LIKE I
COULD TAKE ON THE WORLD!

WELL, I GOTTA GO REST
UP FOR TOMORROW. I'LL LEAVE YOU IN CHARGE
WHILE I'M GONE, NATCH. JUST BE SURE NO ONE
GETS IN MY WINE CELLAR.

YOU
GOT IT.



THE NEXT MORNING...

I'VE NEVER HAD BREAKFAST
ON A TOWER BEFORE. IT'S SO LOVELY
UP HERE. THANK YOU FOR INVITING
US, ARTAXI!

IT'S CERTAINLY
BETTER THAN THE FOOD
I GET IN THE SERVANTS
QUARTERS.

THAT'S NOT
THE REASON I CALLED
THIS MEETING...

YEAGAR IS OUT FIGHTING
THE ANSERINIANS. I DON'T KNOW
WHY. HE THINKS THERE'S TROUBLE
ON THE BORDER, BUT I'VE
HEARD NO REPORTS
OF IT. NO ONE
HAS.

HE'S BEEN AVOIDING
ME FOR WEEKS. I CAN'T SEEM
TO PIGEONHOLE HIM UNLESS I
CALL UPON THE GODS FOR HELP.
AND EVEN THEN, I CAN'T STAY
IF HE TELLS ME TO GO. IT'S
REALLY WEIRD.

HE'S GETTING IRRATIONAL.
I MEAN, NOT HIS USUAL IRRATIONAL. I'VE
NOTICED SERVANTS THAT MAKE MISTAKES TEND
TO GO MISSING. HE'S BEEN BLOWING UP AT
PEOPLE FOR NO REASON, TOO. AND THE DISTILLERY
HE'S GOT ME WORKING ON. IT
LOOKS A LOT LIKE A TEMPLE
OF SOME KIND...

I'VE FOUND SOME INFORMATION
ABOUT THAT GLOVE OF HIS. IT'S MENTIONED IN
SEVERAL HISTORIES AND LEGENDS, ALWAYS BEFORE
A TIME OF GREAT TURMOIL AND CHAOS.

IT ALSO
MENTIONS ROOM FOR
ITS WIELDER.

IT'S TOO BAD THE GUY
WHO PROBABLY KNEW THE MOST ABOUT IT
IS DEAD, KING WHAT-HIS-NAME.

KING PRAVUS!
OF COURSE! SILLY ME
FOR NOT THINKING
OF HIM!

I DOUBT SILLINESS
HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH
IT. WITH YEAGAR AND THAT GAUNTLET
GONE, MY HEAD'S NEVER BEEN
CLEARER.

THEY CREMATED
THE KING, SO I DON'T THINK
THAT CALLING CARD YOU
USE WILL—

YES, I'M CALLING
FOR KING PRAVUS.
YES, I'LL HOLD.



OH, IT'S YOU. YOU'RE FRIENDS WITH THAT LUMMOX WHO WON THE TOURNAMENT, EH? I'M AMAZED YOU'RE STILL ALIVE. HE MUST TRULY VALUE YOUR LIVES.

I GAVE HIM THE GAUNTLET OF SUPREMACY. IT ALLOWS HIM TO BE INVINCIBLE IN BATTLE, COMMAND ANY MORTAL MIND, AND GOVERN WITH ULTIMATE AUTHORITY.

IT'LL ALSO DRIVE HIM MAD, WHICH WILL PROBABLY BE VERY BAD FOR LOCAL PROPERTY VALUES.

WHAT DID YOU PUT ON OUR FRIEND'S HAND?



I WORSHIPPED P'TAOON, ANCIENT GOD OF WAR...

IN EXCHANGE FOR AN ETERNITY OF GLORIOUS BATTLE, I WAS COMMANDED TO FIND THE MOST DESTRUCTIVE OAF IN THE LAND AND PUT THE GAUNTLET ON HIM.

SO I DID, AND SO I'M REWARDED.

I DON'T SUPPOSE P'TAOON MENTIONED WHY HE WANTED THIS DONE?

OTHER THAN THE GLEE HE FEELS WHEN MORTALS WAGE WAR ON ONE ANOTHER? NOT REALLY...

WELL, HE DID MENTION A BARGAIN STRUCK WITH ANOTHER GOD. I THINK YOUR FRIEND IS GOING TO TRY TO CONQUER THE ENTIRE WORLD BEFORE HE'S DONE, IF I CAUGHT P'TAOON'S MEANING.

BESIDES, IT'S NOT LIKE YOU CAN GET IT OFF OF HIM. IT'S FASTENED TO HIS VERY SOUL, SO UNLESS YOU...



Interlude:

THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL HENCHMEN

AND THE MAP SAYS THAT THIS STONE HEAD IS ONLY A FEW LEAGUES FROM OUR TARGET. WE'RE ALMOST THERE!

WOULD YOU MIND READING THE WHOLE LETTER AGAIN?

SURE THING! "DEAR ADVENTURERS, PLEASE COME RAID THE CASTLE OF EVIL-BUT-RICH MONSTERS. WE WILL PAY YOU 10,000 GOLD PIECES WHEN YOU FINISH KILLING EVERYTHING AT THE CASTLE OF EVIL-BUT-RICH MONSTERS. DON'T FORGET TO BRING YOUR HENCHMAN SO YOU CAN CARRY AWAY ALL THE MONEY YOU'RE GOING TO FIND."

DOESN'T THAT CASTLE NAME SOUND A LITTLE ODD TO YOU?

NOPE. "SO BRING YOUR HENCHMAN AND GET READY TO BE WEALTHY! THANK YOU FOR SAVING US FROM THE CASTLE OF EVIL-BUT-RICH MONSTERS. SIGNED, A NEARBY INNOCENT VILLAGE YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF."

DOESN'T THE STRUCTURE OF THAT LETTER TELL YOU SOMETHING?

I'M WAY AHEAD OF YOU!

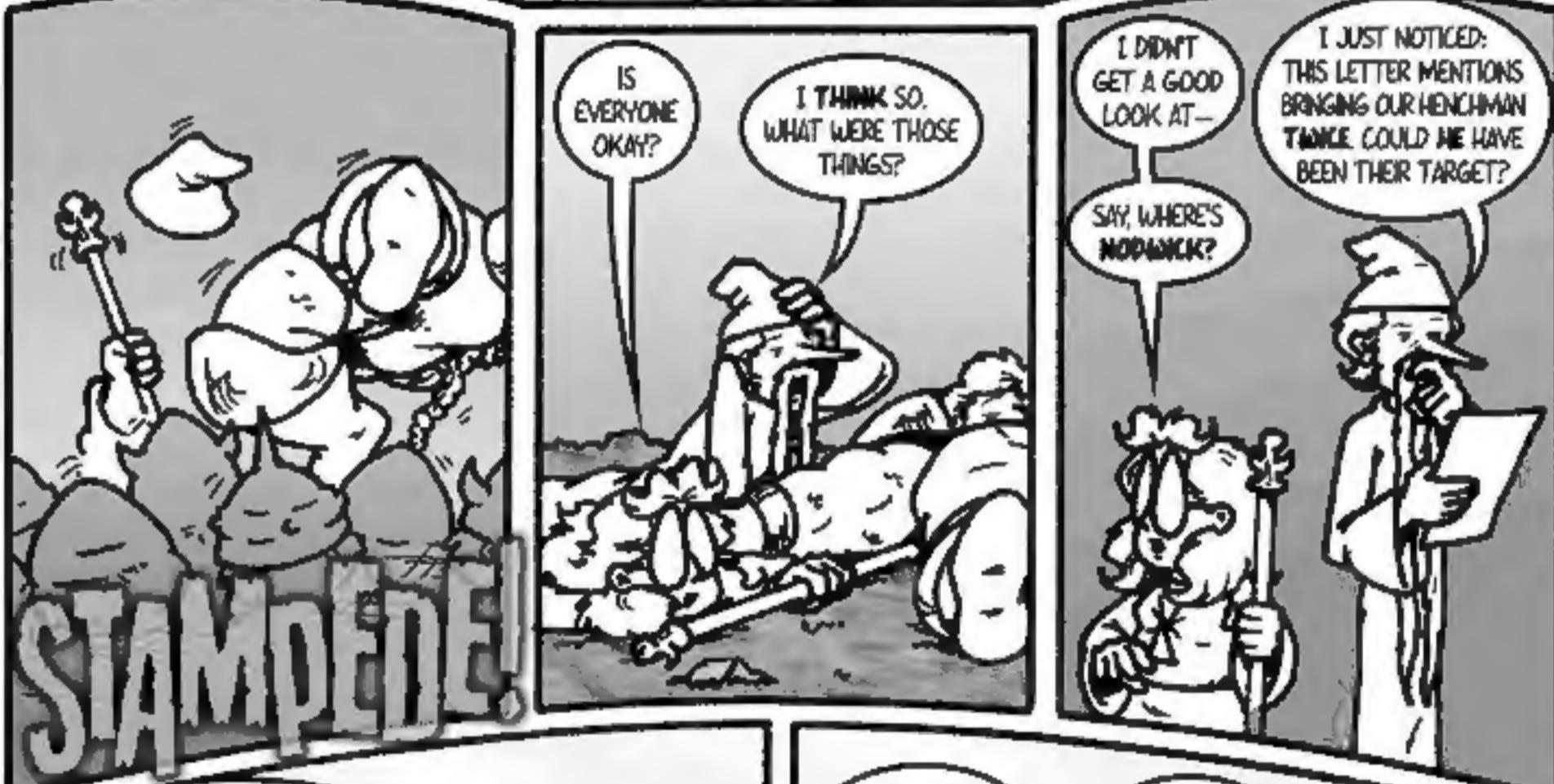
I THINK THE HANDWRITING IS BAD ENOUGH THAT I CAN ADD A FEW MORE ZEROS ON TO THAT REWARD TOTAL.

ARE YOU SURE HIS BRAIN ISN'T CURSED OR SOMETHING?

I'VE HAD A HARD TIME BELIEVING IT, MYSELF...

THIS SO-CALLED "MAP"
LOOKS LIKE IT WAS DRAWN BY A
TOPPLER, AND THAT CASTLE OVER THE
HILL LOOKS FISHER THAN THE LOWER
HALVES OF A DOZEN MERMAIDS. THIS
IS EITHER AN ELABORATE PRANK
OR A SET-UP FOR AN...

AMBUSH!



I TRUST MY
MINIONS DID NOT TREAT
YOU TOO ROUGHLY WHILE
TRANSPORTING YOU HERE.
DID THEY?

WHO--?

TELL ME,
MASTER NODWICK: IS IT
TRUE THAT YOU ONCE
LIFTED AND MOVED THE
GREAT OBELISK OF
PIN-RE-SET FROM HIS
DESERT TOMB?

WAS IT
NOT YOU WHO
BROUGHT THE
COLOSSUS OF
HEGEN-PAIR TO
OUR LANDS ON
YOUR BACK?

WELL, YES, BUT
NEITHER REALLY LOOKED GOOD
ON THE LAWN, SO PIFFANY HAD ME
LUG THEM TO THE CHILDREN'S
MUSEUM...

I CARE NOT
ABOUT YOUR LAND-
SCAPING EFFORTS. WHAT
DOES INTEREST ME IS YOUR
SKILLS IN THE ART OF OBJECT
TRANSPORTATION. YOU
WILL SHARE THEM
WITH US...

IN FACT, IF YOU ARE ANISE,
YOU WILL COME TO CALL THIS PLACE HOME.
YOU WILL BECOME ONE OF US...

ONE OF THE
BROTHERHOOD
OF EVIL
HENCHMEN!

NICE NAME.
DO YOU GET A DECODER
RING WITH THAT?

ONLY AFTER
FIVE YEAR'S SERVICE. I'M
ONLY TWO MORE YEARS AWAY
FROM A MONOGRAMMED
GAROTTE!



COME, I HAVE MUCH
TO SHOW YOU ABOUT OUR
ORGANIZATION...



BEHOLD THE BROTHERHOOD!
WE ARE A BAND OF HUMANS, HUMANOIDS, AND
OTHER MOSTLY ILL-SPRITED RACES, BOUND TO
SERVE THOSE WHO STRIVE TO BRING CHAOS AND
WICKEDNESS TO THE WORLD.

I AM SURE THIS PLACE IS NOT UNLIKE YOUR
UNION HALL. WE ARE ASSIGNED TO OUR MASTERS, WE TRADE
TALES, WE SEEK TO COLLECTIVELY IMPROVE OUR LOT WHEN
NOT STABBING EACH OTHER IN THE BACK.



WHEREAS YOU AND YOUR ILK ARE
COMMITTED TO THE TRANSPORTATION OF
BULKY ITEMS, OUR SPECIALTIES LIE MOSTLY IN
THE PROCUREMENT OF RARE AND UNUSUAL
ITEMS KEY IN DIABOLICAL PLANS.

WELCOME,
STRANGER!
BRAIN?

SOME OF US,
HOWEVER, TEND TO GET IN
A BIT OF A RUT...



NOW COME,
WE HAVE MUCH
TO LEARN FROM
EACH OTHER...

I WANT
TO SEE YOU
LIFT IT.

THIS OBELISK WAS
HEWN FROM THE HEARTSTONE OF A
DEAD VOLCANO. IT TOOK HUNDREDS
OF MEN TO BRING IT HERE.

I CAN'T JUST
LIFT SOMETHING
LIKE THAT!

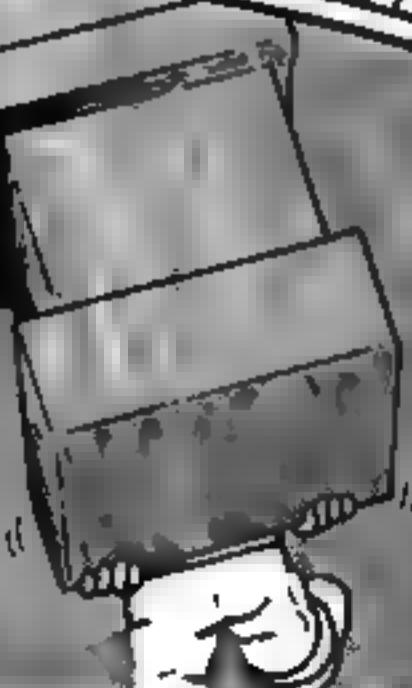
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
SURELY YOU'VE HAD GREATER
LOADS ON YOUR BACK...

BUT LIFTING THAT WOULD SURELY
SNAP MY SPINE! IT MUST WEIGH AT LEAST FIVE
TONS, AND YOU WANT ME TO TRY AND PICK IT UP?
YOU'VE GOT TO BE JOKING.

SAY, YOU DON'T THINK
IT WOULD LOOK BETTER OVER AGAINST
THE WALL, DO YOU?

HOW'S IT
GOING?

I THINK I MIGHT
HAVE UNCOVERED A RATHER
BIZARRE SECRET ABOUT
HOW THE UNIVERSE
WORKS...



I CAN SEE THAT YOU HAVE MUCH TO TEACH US ABOUT THE WAYS OF TRANSPORTING THINGS. NOW, LET ME TELL YOU WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER YOU.

OURS IS A WAY BASED ON PROCUREMENT. WHEN OUR MASTERS ASK US TO FETCH SOMETHING, ANYTHING, IF IT IS POSSIBLE, WE CAN GET IT.

BEOBOR, FOR EXAMPLE, HE WAS ASKED TO FETCH A BRAIN, AND THOUGH THERE IS MARY A SOUL FOR LEAGUES IN ANY DIRECTION, HE FOUND ONE.

IT WAS NOTHING, MASTER THEOBOR...

BY THE WAY, WHO ASKED YOU TO FETCH IT?

WHY YOU DID.

WHAT? WHEN DID I DO THAT?

AFTER I SPILLED ORANGE JUICE ON YOUR CROSSWORD THIS MORNING, YOU SAID, "IF I HAD HALF A MIND..." WELL, THE REST OF IT WAS GARBLED, BUT I WENT OUT AND—

YES, YES. WE NEVER SAID THAT VERBAL INNANCE WAS ONE OF OUR STRONG SUITS.

HANG ON, YOU SAID HALF A MIND. WHY DID HE BRING BACK A WHOLE BRAIN?

FROM WHAT I COULD TELL, IT WASN'T DOING THE WORK OF AN ENTIRE BRAIN FOR ITS OWNER, SO I PLAYED IT SAFE...

A RELATIVE OF YOURS, WAS HE?

I'M THINKING OUR ORGANIZATIONS HAVE MORE IN COMMON THAN I'M COMFORTABLE WITH...

WELL, LOOK, THIS IS FLATTERING
AND ALL, BUT I'M AFRAID I'M UNDER CONTRACT
WITH THE HENCHMAN'S LOCAL. I COULDNT
JOIN YOU EVEN IF I WANTED TO.

THAT'S THE BEAUTY
OF IT. IF YOU CAME OVER TO
OUR SIDE, CONTRACTS WOULD
HAVE NO HOLD OVER YOU.
BREAKING YOUR WORD IS A
BENEFIT OF WORKING WITH
OUR ORGANIZATION.

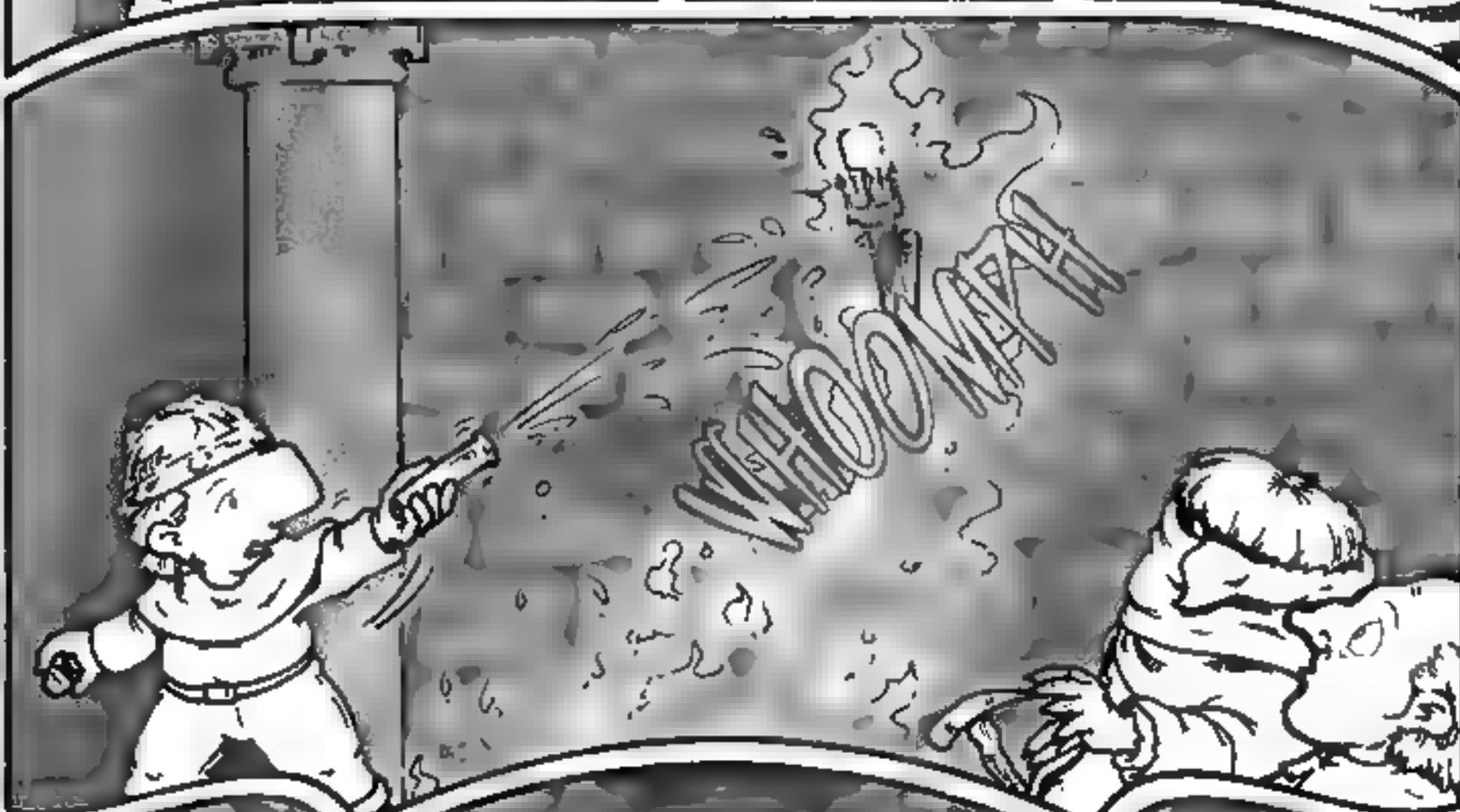
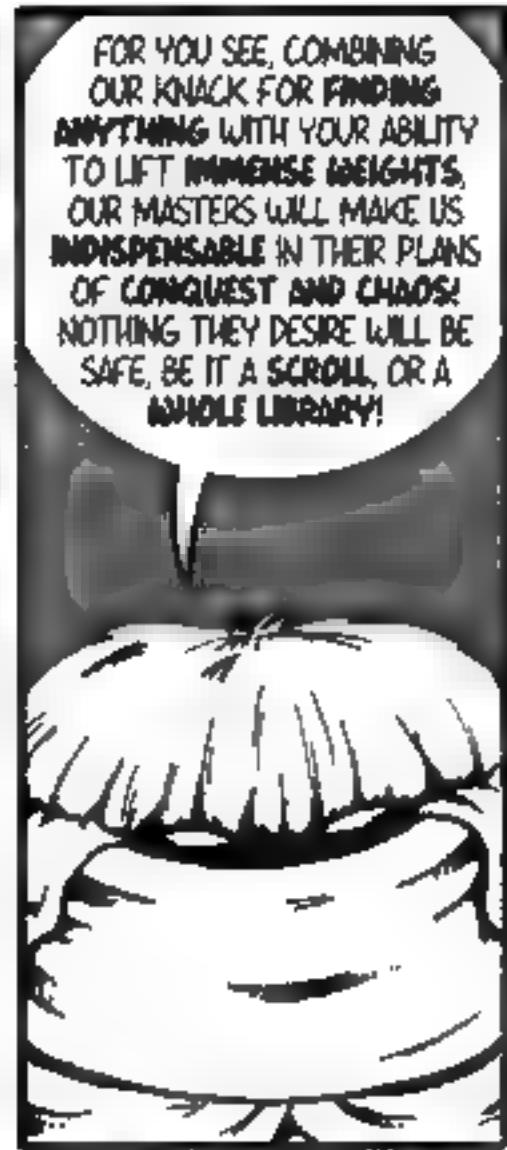
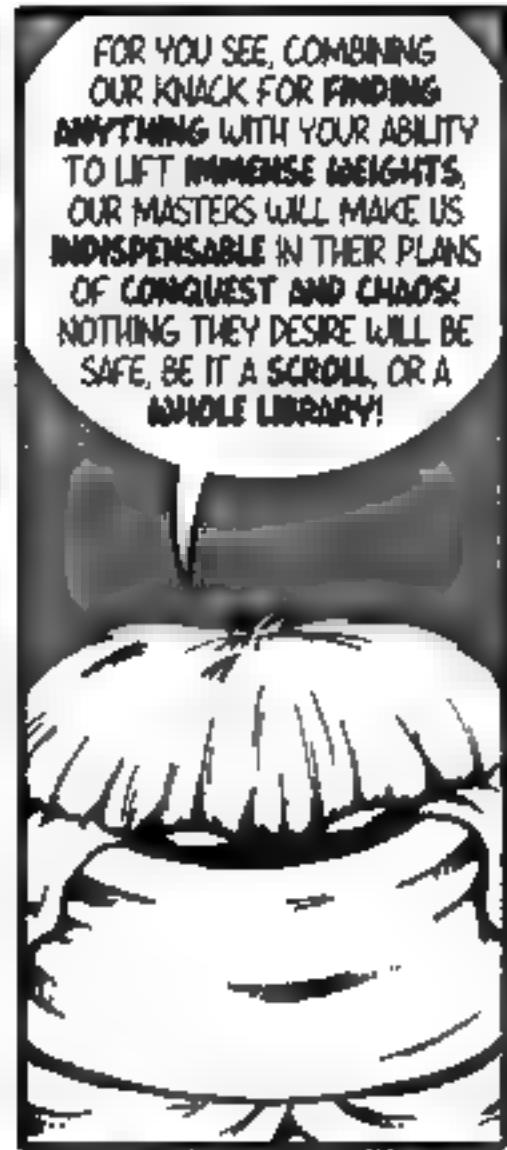
BENEFITS? WHAT
OTHER KINDS OF BENEFITS
DO YOU GET?

OH, LET'S SEE... YOU GET TO
ASSOCIATE WITH POWERFUL A-TYPE
PERSONALITIES. YOUR SALARY CONSISTS OF ALL THE
MONEY YOU CAN SCROUNCE FROM YOUR EMPLOYERS
VICTIMS. YOU GET TO TORMENT PRISONERS AND
OTHERS BELOW YOU. THE LIST GOES ON. WHAT
KIND OF BENEFITS DO YOU GET?

JUST ENOUGH PAY
TO KEEP FROM STARVING. FREE
TRAVEL TO EXOTIC LANDS. FAMILIARITY
WITH NON-HUMANOID BIOLOGY, MOSTLY
DIGESTIVE SYSTEMS. FREEDOM FROM
THE FEAR OF DYING...

SOUNDS LOVELY.
WHY WOULD YOU EVER
WANT TO QUIT?

WELL, OF
COURSE IT SOUNDS BAD
WHEN YOU SAY IT LIKE
THAT.



BUT OUR HEALTH PLAN IS WAY MORE POTENT THAN OURS!

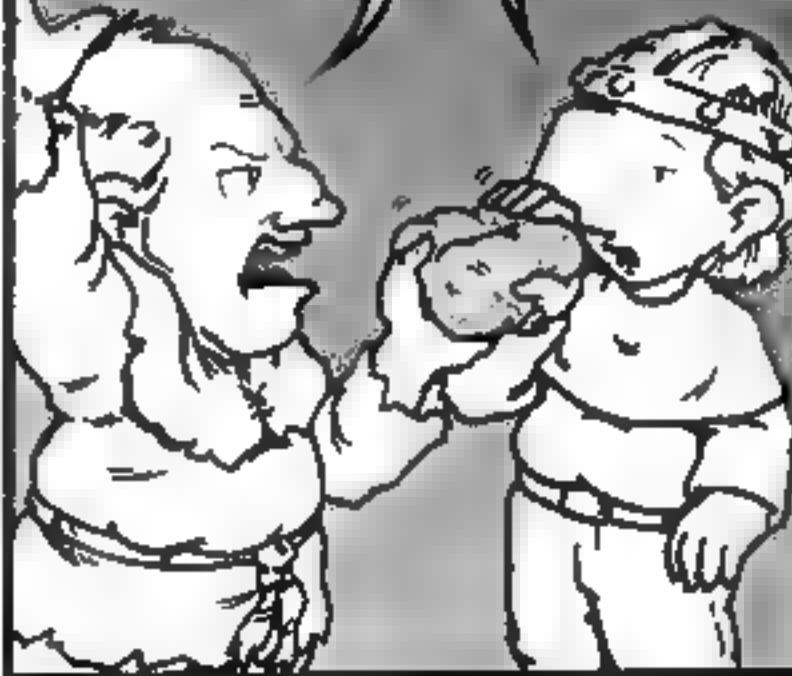


NODWICK DIDN'T NEED TO FEEL SORRY FOR LONG...

OH, THAT
WASN'T NICE AT
ALL! I GOT IN
SO MUCH
TROUBLE!

THEOGOR
TOLD ME THAT IF I
DIDN'T COME BACK WITH
YOU IN TWENTY MINUTES,
I'D BE SMART TO NOT
COME BACK
AT ALL!

THEN YOU
DON'T HAVE TO GO
BACK. I THINK I LAST
SAW YOU ABOUT
THIRTY MINUTES
AGO.



OH, YOU'RE RIGHT.
I KNEW I SHOULDN'T HAVE
STOPPED IN THE BATHROOM TO
MOISTEN MY BRAIN!

TOUGH BREAK.
YOU WIN SOME, YOU
LOSE SOME.

SIGH...
TOO TRUE.
YOU SHOULD LEARN
TO RELAX. IF YOU NEED
ME, YOU'LL KNOW WHERE
TO FIND ME.

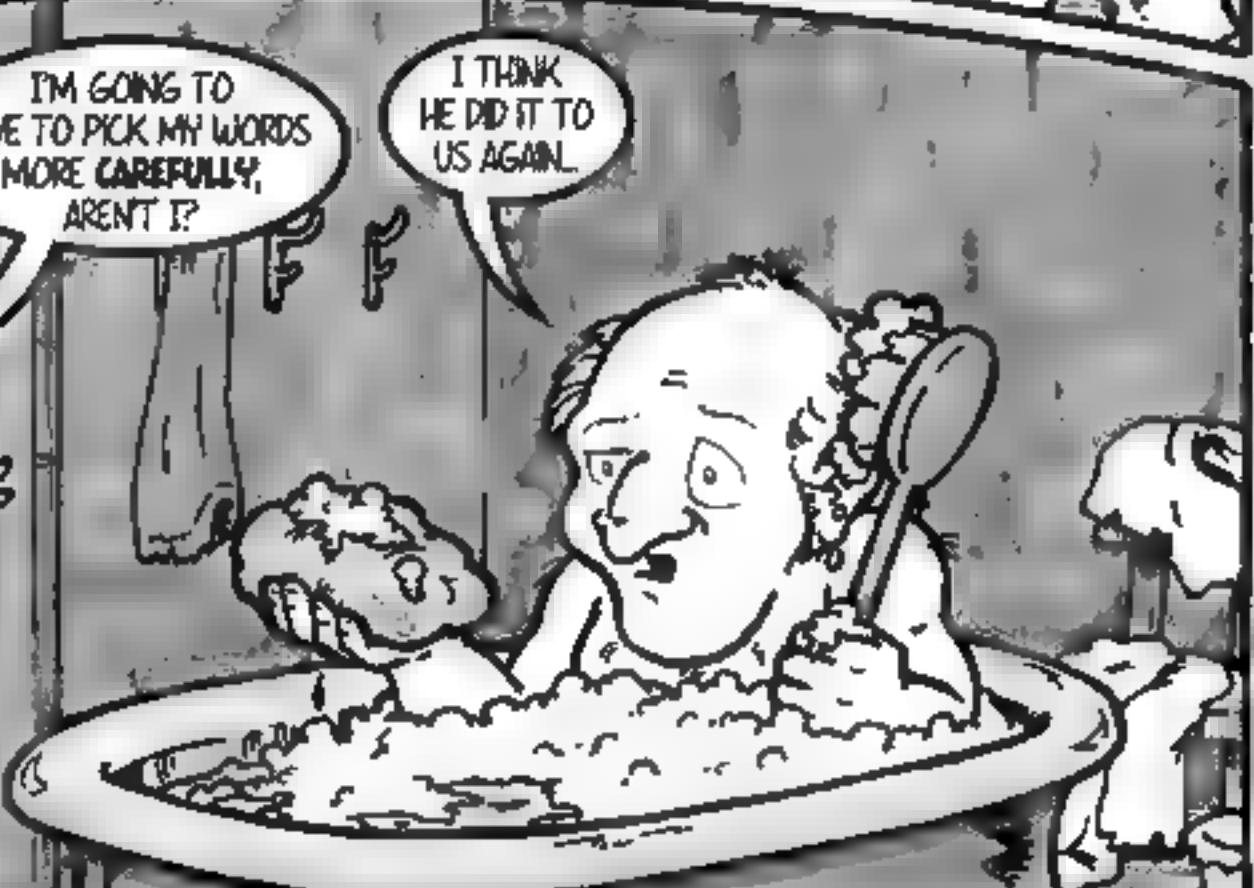


ONE SCRUBBING LATER...

BATH

I'M GOING TO
HAVE TO PICK MY WORDS
MORE CAREFULLY,
AREN'T I?

I THINK
HE DID IT TO
US AGAIN.



I'VE FINALLY FOUND
THE EXIT!! OF COURSE, I DON'T KNOW
WHICH WAY LEADS HOME...

DOOOGH, I'M IN
SUCH A MOOD!

NO MORE
TRICKS! YOU AND I
ARE SUPPOSED TO COME
BACK TO THEOGOR.
NO DELAYS, NO
NOTHING!

OKAY.
DUMP THE BRAIN
AND LET'S GO.

WHAT? MY
BRAIN?

HE SAID ONLY
YOU AND I. THE BRAIN'S
A THIRD WHEEL, DON'T
YOU THINK?

BUT I'VE
NEVER JUST
LEFT A BRAIN
BEFORE...

WELL, I COULD
PUT IT BACK FOR
YOU, IF I KNEW
WHERE YOU GOT IT
FROM...

WOULD YOU?
I FOUND IT IN A
HEAD OFF TO THE
SOUTHWEST. I
DON'T THINK YOU
CAN MISS IT.

NO PROBLEM.
I'LL MAKE SURE IT
GETS THERE SAFE
AND SOUND!

I'M LOOKING FOR
SOMETHING NEW NOW: A
REASON NOT TO HURT YOU
FURTHER...

I DON'T
SUPPOSE YOU'D
LIKE ME TO GO
FIND ONE FOR
YOU?

OUR HERO HIKE FOR MILES, LOOKING FOR ANYTHING FAMILIAR...

SIGH. I'VE BEEN
WALKING FOR HOURS, AND I'M
STILL NO CLOSER TO KNOWING
WHERE I AM.

YOU'RE QUITE
THE CLEVER ONE,
AREN'T YOU?

THEODOR?
HOW DID YOU GET
OUT HERE?

NEVER MIND THAT.
YOU'LL BE HAPPY TO KNOW
THAT I CONSIDER YOU TOO
MUCH TROUBLE TO
BOTHER WITH.

UPON FURTHER REFLECTION, I'VE NOTED THAT YOUR
UNION'S ABILITIES WOULD NOT BE PRACTICAL FOR THE SUBTLE
NEEDS OF THE BROTHERHOOD'S EMPLOYERS. WHAT GOOD IS HAVING
THE CONTENTS OF A ~~WIZARD'S~~ TOWER IF THE ENTIRE TOWER
ALLOWS YOUR ENEMIES TO EASILY FIND YOUR LAIR?

PLUS, UNLESS YOU
HENCHMEN COOPERATE WILLINGLY,
YOU SEEM TO ■ TOO DIFFICULT
FOR THE BROTHERHOOD TO
EFFECTIVELY RESTRAIN.

GOOD
POINTS, I
GUESS...

AND DONT BOTHER
TRYING TO CONVINCE
ANYONE OF OUR EXISTENCE.
THE PLACE YOU VISITED IS
BUT ONE OF MANY, AND
IT SHALL BE GONE BEFORE
THE SUN SETS.

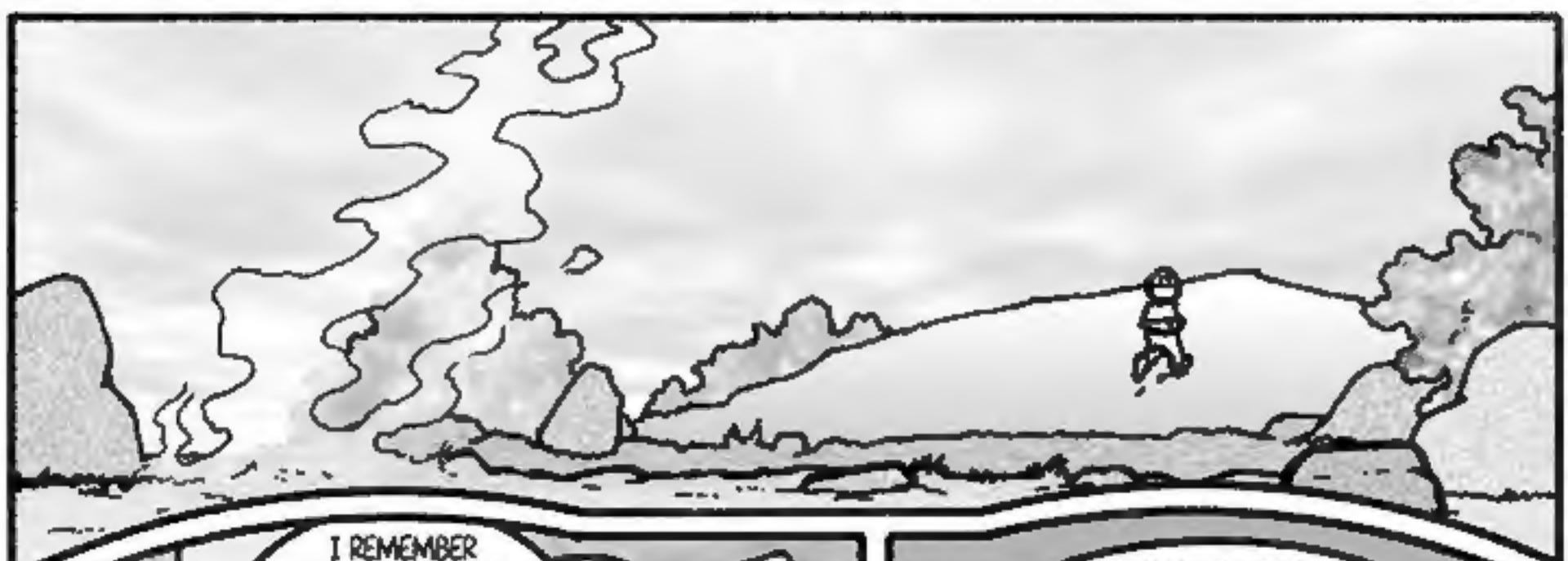
DONT WORRY.
I DONT THINK I'D MIND
NOT SEEING YOU AGAIN.
NO OFFENSE.

NONE TAKEN. YOUR FRIENDS ARE
SEARCHING FOR YOU. TWO OF THEM
ARE JUST BEYOND THAT RISE.





I'M AFRAID YOU WILL SEE
ME AGAIN, HENCHMAN, AND YOU WILL SERVE
ME, AS WILL YOUR BRETHREN.







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